

# Was Pres. Shonts (The New York Traction Magnate) "Vamped"

## How "My Friend Amanda C. Thomas," Chorus Girl, Twice Married and Twice Divorced, Won the Old Millionaire's Affection and Turns Up With a "Will" That Gives Her His Estate



President Shonts in one of his thirty-six suits of clothes and one of his forty-five pairs of shoes. Shonts held his wife and family down to rigid economy, while he had plenty of money for himself and his friend Amanda and his daily boutonniere.

### CHAPTER VI.

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(Continued from Last Sunday)

**W**HAT has become of Theodore P. Shonts's millions? In her suit against Mrs. Thomas it is asserted by Mrs. Shonts, the disinherited widow, that by her "artifices, immoralities and wiles" Amanda Caskie Thomas debauched the old president of the Interborough and practically "vamped" him of his property.

Did Shonts have a property worth several millions? Did he and others deliberately plan a campaign of falsehood to camouflage and hide his millions?

Certainly there are some very strange things which become easy to understand if Shonts was pretending poverty to his wife and children so he would have the more to lavish on "my friend Amanda."

In a previous article it has been shown why Shonts probably had at least \$4,000,000, and may have been worth twice that sum—and yet when Amanda and her friends turned up with the queer "last will" they announced that Shonts's big fortune had dwindled to only half a million!

What has become of President Shonts's millions? That is one of the things which Mrs. Shonts's attorneys, ex-Attorney-General Griggs, Judge Warren Dixon and Mr. George W. Miles, are patiently investigating.

This matter of Shonts's fortune is a very important one for the widow and children. His money has certainly disappeared. Has it been hidden away by a very shrewdly planned campaign of lying and misleading pretenses?

Have wife and daughters been victimized by a very clever trick to cover up a handsome fortune and discourage any search to find and recover it?

Writing to his daughter Marguerite in January, 1915, Shonts pretends to be in "serious financial troubles," and hasn't a dollar to spare for her. He tells her he finds she has a forgotten bank balance in a Chicago savings bank of \$355.31, and that her sister Theodora (Duchess de Chaulnes) has a balance of \$408.74—a total of \$764.05 and a little accrued interest. And Shonts advises her to use her own savings bank money to pay her expenses.

Shonts at that time had a salary of \$2,500 a week from the Interborough—and probably additional income from his private fortune of another \$4,000 or \$5,000 a week.

**W**HEN Theodore P. Shonts, president of New York's rapid transit lines, died last summer the scandal which, during his lifetime, he had been able to smother soon burst into flame. And no wonder.

From the mystery and secrecy of the dead man's sick room emerged a remarkable figure—Mrs. Amanda Caskie Thomas. This woman had been Shonts's intimate companion, sharing his apartment, his automobile, his vacation outings and his check book. This former chorus girl had complete domination over the old traction magnate—while she and her little son nestled close to Shonts and his money she forbade her servants to allow Shonts's own wife and daughters to come near him.

Seizing everything worth carting away from his town apartment and country house, Mrs. Thomas produced an itemized bill of sale from Shonts of everything from a shoe horn to a baby grand piano, and in due time turned up with a "last will" leaving her the bulk of her millionaire admirer's estate. The old traction multi-millionaire, in some way, had been thoroughly well stripped of his millions! Did "my friend Amanda Thomas," as he calls her in his "will," get it all?

The widow, Mrs. Shonts, has appealed to the courts to throw out this very suspicious and peculiar "last will," and she has also begun

actions to get the Shonts millions away from Mrs. Thomas, who, she swears, debauched Shonts and lured him into her power like a Vampire, by "her artifices, immoralities and wiles."

Mrs. Amanda C. Thomas stands forth as a very remarkable figure. Her intimacy with Shonts she carried on with brazen indifference to what servants and others saw, said or thought. Surrounded by rich friends of herself and Shonts and the Interborough lawyers, she seems to have felt secure from exposure or legal consequences.

But the skeleton has been dragged forth from "my friend Amanda's" closet by the court proceedings begun by Mrs. Shonts. Did Mrs. Thomas "Vamp" President Shonts out of his fortune, as Mrs. Shonts, in effect, asserts? The courts will be asked to decide whether Mrs. Thomas shall be permitted to keep the Shonts fortune while the widow and children are left almost penniless. And it is a great moral issue as well as a legal issue, as Rev. Dr. Stratton, of Calvary Baptist Church, pointed out in a recent sermon in these words:

"If the wronged wife is finally robbed and the other woman gets this money, will not the tendency be for every weak girl in the city to ask herself the question, 'If she did these things and got away with it and now flourishes, why may not I?'"

Bearing this in mind, the following extract from Shonts's letter to his daughter Marguerite is very interesting:

January 22, 1915.

My Dear Daughter:

I am enclosing a check for \$775.48, which is the total of the old balances—probably overlooked by all of us—that you and Toosie had in the savings department of the Continental and Commercial Bank, in Chicago. This cleans up those two accounts, and I have to-day receipted for your pass-books in the names of both of you.

I was in hopes I could add \$500 of my own, as a gift, but find it impossible to do so as yet. The first \$500 I am able to send I want to be for your deferred birthday presents, and I hope that you will use it for yourself, and not apply it to any general fund of the family. However, I suppose we need not worry about the use of it until I get in shape to send it to you.

With much love,

YOUR PAPA.

The great president of the Interborough, with a salary of nearly \$500 a day, hasn't a dollar to spare for his daughter! Nothing to spare for a birthday remembrance!

The great traction magnate answers his daughter's appeal for money to pay her expenses—by sending money he drew out of her savings bank account!

What an absurd situation!

Shonts with his fat, weekly salary and his "bonuses" and heaven knows what other honest or shady sources of income, divvies and "jokers" in fat Interborough contracts—Shonts, a man of millions, president of enormous corporations, a man who rode about in his private railway car; this man draws out a pitiful \$355 from a child's savings bank and hands it to her to pay her expenses!

No novelist would dare write such a scene. No dramatist would dare stage such a preposterous situation. The critics would laugh at it as overdrawn, impossible!

Not a dollar for daughter Marguerite could he raise—but for "my friend Amanda"—!

Let the reader look in on this little scene in Mrs. Thomas's apartment on West End avenue, as narrated by Alfred, the butler!

"When Mrs. Thomas wished money she would ask for it at the breakfast table. I heard many times her asking for large amounts of money. Usually Mr. Shonts would write a check for her. Sometimes he brought home money in large denomination bills at night, and would give them to her at the dinner table"—Alfred, the butler, asserts.

"Once I heard a conversation at the breakfast table over ten thousand dollars that Mrs. Thomas wanted that day to pay for something she had purchased and for which a bill had been rendered. She had the bill at the breakfast table and had showed it to him. I heard him say, 'I think that is a little extravagant; I don't like it very well.' She replied, 'Well, it can't be helped. I just have to have it—and it is not so very much, after all. Any way it will not happen again.' I did not hear whether he gave her the money or not."

Plenty of money for "my friend Amanda," but not a dollar for a birthday remembrance for Shonts's daughters. Shonts was writing checks and bringing home bundles of bills for Amanda, but his daughter Marguerite had better draw her little balance out of the savings bank to pay her expenses. Shonts had plenty of money to indulge Mrs. Thomas—but not for his family. And Shonts was also very kind to himself with his money.

Was Shonts deliberately playing a game with his wife and family in crying poverty to cover up the truth about his millions and what he was doing with them?

Here is a sad wail from the poor president of the Interborough:

INTERBOROUGH METROPOLITAN COMPANY,  
165 Broadway, New York.  
Office of the President.

November 13.

My Dear Marguerite:

On account of my situation here I have brought down my own expenses, which never were very large, down to a minimum.

For instance, I have bought nothing for myself this Fall, and am only planning to give one dinner during the Winter, and that is the Pennsylvania Society, which is the cheapest and easiest way of paying my men's dinner obligations. I am refusing most dinner invitations, as heretofore, and outside of this one instance do not expect to

spend a dollar in the way of entertaining.

With love to you, Toosie, and the boy, I remain,

Your affectionate

FATHER.

Would this letter create the impression that Shonts was doing his share in the pinching and economizing? Does it present the picture of a rather shabby genteel old gentleman, overcoat a trifle frayed, his suit a bit shiny, a hat of ancient vintage and shoes pretty well down at the heels? Poor Mr. Shonts!

Well, turn from this appealing picture of hard-up Shonts and look at the inventory of his hats and clothes and shoes, etc., which is on file in the Surrogate's office. This is the list of some of poor Mr. Shonts's skimmed and limited wardrobe as found in Shonts's apartment and itemized by the Guaranty Trust Company, temporary administrator of the estate:

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1 Riding suit.                  | 36 Suits of clothes.                   |
| 1 Duck hunting suit.            | 8 Overcoats.                           |
| 1 corduroy suit.                | 19 Hats.                               |
| 1 Duck trousers and belt.       | 125 Shirts.                            |
| 2 pairs leggings.               | 1 Pair riding boots.                   |
| 7 Pairs white flannel trousers. | 1 Pair hunting shoes.                  |
| 2 Linen yachting suits.         | 45 Pairs shoes (black, white and tan). |
| 4 Linen fishing suits.          |  |

Now, read again his words in his letter to his daughter Marguerite. "My expenses, which never were very large, I have bought nothing for myself this Fall, etc."

And then look at those 45 pairs of shoes—more than \$500 worth of shoes—and suit after suit of clothes; does it look as if Shonts was holding his family down to the most rigid economies by the fictitious cry of poverty, while there was plenty of money for Amanda and himself?

How does Mrs. Shonts know that Shonts had plenty of money for Amanda, his "friend," but not for Mrs. Shonts, the wife? Oh! in a hundred ways—and here's one.

For a number of years the Shontses had lived at the Hotel Plaza, Fifth avenue and Fifty-ninth street. In the early days, before Mrs. Thomas became such a devoted friend of the traction millionaire, the Shonts family had regular accounts at all the important New York shops. But Shonts now shut down on this, gave the family a small allowance for expenses and forbade them to run any bills anywhere.

In the Fall of 1911 Mrs. Shonts and the daughters went to Europe. Shonts remained in New York and lived at the Hotel Plaza. In the Spring of 1912 Mrs. Shonts returned to America and went to the Plaza, where the clerk handed her a bundle of mail that had accumulated. One of the first envelopes she opened contained a bill from Lord & Taylor, the dry goods store, for \$150.53 for very feminine articles. The bill was addressed to "Mrs. T. P. Shonts, Plaza Hotel, Room 1034." It covered items for the months of December, and January, while Mrs. Shonts was in Paris. This is the bill:

LORD & TAYLOR	
Founded 1826	
Importers and Dealers in Foreign and Domestic Dry Goods	
New York, Jan. 2, 1912.	
MRS. T. P. SHONTS.	
PLAZA HOTEL, ROOM 1034.	
CITY.	
Telephone Gramercy 4700	
Dec.—To acct. rend.	\$108.34
395—Jan. 2—	
1 Sp. cotton	.08
1 Sp. cotton	.05
1 Box hairpins	.25
1 Pkg. hairpins (cg)	.15
1 Cd. Pins	.10
1 Cd. Pins	.06
1 Cd. Pins	.09
1 Pr. gloves (2.25)	4.50
1 Pr. gloves	2.95
1 Pr. stones	7.00
1 Bath brush	1.75
1 Bath brush	.65
1 Pr. buckles	10.00
1 Pr. buckles	7.00
1 Pr. buckles	3.00
2 Yds. satin (78)	1.56
1 Yd. satin	.78
1 D. D. M. cotton (15)	.60
1 Pc. ribbon	.25
3 1/2 Yds. ribbon (39)	1.37
TOTAL	\$150.53

And besides this Lord & Taylor bill there were several

other similar bills—one from Sterns, including "six pairs of garters." Mrs. Shonts was interested to know if a mistake had been made by the tradesmen, and she dropped in at Lord & Taylor's and asked if Mrs. T. P. Shonts's account was in good shape or whether there was any unpaid balance due. She knew Shonts had closed out her old account, had forbidden her to charge any things and that she had been in Europe for several months, and, of course, had not been in the store or made any purchases.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Shonts," said the credit man, "your account is in excellent condition, and you owe nothing except the purchases of the present month."

"But how about this bill of last December and January? Is this still unpaid?" Mrs. Shonts asked.

"Oh, that's the bill that was lost. I remember we had to send a second bill, because it went astray. Mr. Shonts paid it some time ago."

Mrs. Shonts pondered the situation a little and concluded that if there was an active and unlimited charge account in the name of Mrs. T. P. Shonts she would make use of it—did anybody have a better right to use it? She soon found out.

Mrs. Shonts—the genuine, the real, lawful Mrs. Shonts—charged a few purchases of linen, necessities for herself and her daughters. When the first of the month came she did not get a bill, but one morning Shonts came bursting into the room with his mail in his hand.

"What do you mean by getting things on credit at Lord & Taylor's? I told you not to charge things—that account is not for you! You take those things back! I won't pay for them!"

So there WAS somebody with a better right to that "Mrs. T. P. Shonts" account than the genuine Mrs. Theodore P. Shonts.

And next day a humiliating experience was in store for Miss Marguerite Shonts. Not knowing of the scene between her father and unfortunate mother over that account, Miss Marguerite purchased something she needed and asked that it be charged to the account of her mother, Mrs. Shonts. "Certainly," said the shopgirl, and handed the purchase to Miss Shonts.

Just as she was leaving the store a floorwalker, quite out of breath from running the length of the store, stopped her.

"I am very sorry, Miss Shonts," panted the floorwalker, "but I shall have to ask you to let me have the package. We have had orders from Mr. Shonts that none of his family are to charge anything on the account of Mrs. T. P. Shonts. It seems there has been some mistake and that the account we have been carrying was not intended for Mrs. Shonts at all—but for some one else."

Certainly a most unpleasant episode for Miss Mar-

Fac-simile of bill from Lord & Taylor for articles bought by "Mrs. T. P. Shonts" while the real Mrs. T. P. Shonts was in Europe.

Jules Bizuel in his army uniform was confidential man for Shonts for many years.